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SUBJECT: MONTENEGRO AND NEXT STEPS ON NATO

Classified By: Ambassador Roderick Moore, for Reasons 1.4(B,D)

1. (U) This message was drafted by AmEmbassy Podgorica.

2. (C) Summary: Even if MAP is unachievable, encouraging gestures to Montenegro at the NATO Summit would advance our objectives in the Balkans and beyond. Positive signals would a) encourage pro-Western reformers throughout the region, including in Serbia, b) parry increasing Russian assertiveness in the region, c) keep Montenegro's leadership on a pro-NATO course, and d) reaffirm to the region, Europe, and Russia that NATO's door is still open. End Summary.

MONTENEGRO) ON A POSITIVE TRAJECTORY

3. (C) In the immediate term, Montenegro is the only potentially viable candidate for MAP among the four ex-Yugoslav countries (with Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo) outside of MAP. Montenegro's leadership is pursuing an aggressive and unambiguous pro-NATO agenda, and it is the only non-MAP Balkan state not facing intractable diplomatic or legal challenges. Russia has not expressed qualms about Montenegro's NATO aspirations, and Montenegro is small enough that it presents no significant institutional, political, or military challenges. In February, a NATO team gave Montenegro high marks on its PARP and IPAP assessments in recognition of the country's substantial progress on defense, political, and economic reforms) reforms in significant part shaped and supported by the USG. In addition, the GOM has made substantial progress on each of the 11 NATO-related priority areas that the USG identified last autumn as indicators of Montenegro's readiness for closer links with the Alliance.

4. (C) Despite relatively low levels of public support for NATO in Montenegro, the GOM has assumed the political risks of hewing to a strongly pro-NATO course. It is in USG interest to encourage this sort of policy leadership throughout the region. A failure by NATO to make a positive gesture to Montenegro at the Summit could significantly dampen GOM enthusiasm for taking the sort of risky political moves it has recently taken at our urging (e.g, Kosovo recognition, MANPAD destruction, Afghanistan infantry deployment, Article 98, etc.).

5. (C) Some have argued that Montenegro is trying to move too quickly toward MAP. In fact, Montenegro is already moving at a slower pace than did the last country to be invited into MAP) Croatia in 2002. (Croatia progressed from PFP to MAP in about 24 months. Montenegro has already been in PFP for about 27 months).

STABILIZING SOUTH-CENTRAL EUROPE

6. (C) Integrating the remaining Balkan countries into NATO (when they are ready) will help cement the permanent stability that has eluded this region over the centuries.

However, behind Albania and Croatia (and Macedonia), there are no others in the membership pipeline. Indeed, no country has entered MAP in 7 years -- and only one (Croatia) since 1999. As a result, the credibility and, more importantly, the carrot of NATO's open door mantra are under scrutiny in the Balkans.

17. (C) Montenegrin progress toward NATO at the Summit would send a strong signal to other ex-Yugoslav states that positive behavior yields positive rewards. This signal would be especially powerful in Serbia, given the interlocked histories of the two countries.

PARRYING RUSSIA

18. (C) Signaling NATO's interest in Montenegro at the Summit would also help parry Russia's renewed assertiveness throughout the region. So far, Montenegro's policies have remained firmly pro-Western, despite sizeable Russian investment earlier this decade. A strong gesture from NATO would help ensure that the GOM does not drift away from its pro-Western course.

REAFFIRMING THE REGATTA

19. (C) In the next rounds of NATO and EU integration, some Allies appear inclined to abandon the very successful and powerfully motivating Regatta approach) i.e., moving countries ahead at the pace they set for themselves. Citing Montenegro's small size, some Allies argue that the remaining Balkan countries (or at least Montenegro and Serbia) should be coupled together on the path toward NATO. However, holding back Montenegro) say, until Serbia sorts out its ICTY and Kosovo issues, or Bosnia deals with constitutional issues, or Kosovo obtains recognition by all NATO members -- would undercut pro-NATO reformers here and ultimately make Montenegro a less reliable partner and more susceptible to Russian and nationalist inroads.

POSSIBLE SUMMIT OUTCOMES

10. (C) An invitation to Montenegro to enter MAP in the near future would probably require a determined USG push. Some Allies have expressed reservations, but none has drawn an indelible red line. If we determine that a MAP invitation for Montenegro cannot be accomplished at the upcoming Summit itself, the Alliance should consider other strongly encouraging gestures to keep the GOM on its pro-Western course and to limit the risks of the possible negative ramifications discussed above. Possible outcomes at the Summit could include:

-- A signal that Montenegro could join MAP later this year (perhaps following an assessment of its IPAP/PARP progress at an upcoming Ministerial)

-- A decision to send NAC Ambassadors to Montenegro to assess Montenegro's readiness for MAP;

-- A stand-alone reference to Montenegro (i.e., separate from references to other non-MAP Western Balkan states) in the Summit Communiqué congratulating Montenegro on its progress and offering encouraging words about its prospects for MAP and NATO integration

-- A decision to open a NATO Liaison Office in Podgorica

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